

# Production, Sale and Export as Aspects of National Economic Development

- A Buddhist Review in relation to Sri Lanka

*Professor Dhammavihari Thera*

These concepts of production, sale and export imply that people, individuals or groups or even a country as a whole, have in excess of their needs many things that they can dispose of to others, near or far, in exchange for monetary returns. These things may include, among others, many items of natural resources like minerals etc., produce obtained from the seas and the forests and agricultural output generated by man and manufactured goods of industrial production. All these imply that man has already gone well beyond the age of food gatherers. In many areas in Sri Lanka, even today, we are still primitive gatherers than growers according to a set plan or pattern.

Buddhist texts envisage, in their myths and legends, that man even as far back as the food gatherers' age, like old Adam of Biblical origin, was showing signs of becoming more and more corrupt and immoral [*Tesaṃ no pāpakānaññeva akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pātubhāvā ...DN. III.91*]. He was trying to overstep his limits and go beyond bounds of propriety. In either case, it was undoubtedly being offensive to men and women with whom humans have to live in comradeship.

To food gatherers, self-growing corn is said to have been freely available. But a gradual breakdown in their moral goodness apparently brought about a shortage of food. The matter had to be taken up seriously and apportioning of food supplies had necessarily to come about. Buddhist texts show grave concern over this and the corrective steps taken are referred to as 'rationing out the available supply of grain and setting up limits of consumption' [*Yannūna mayaṃ sāliṃ vibhajeyyāma mariyādaṃ thapeyyāmā ' ti. op. cit.92*].

It should be noted here that we suspect the translation of the above lines in Rhys Davids' Dialogues of the Buddha [1921], Vol.III. p.87 which runs as ' Come now **let us divide off the rice fields** and **set boundaries there to** ' to be somewhat off the mark. We readily admit that Rhys Davids' work was a pioneering one. It is more than surprising to find Maurice Walshe, sixty-six years later, making the rendering no better in his translation Thus Have I Heard [1987], p. 412. This is what he produces: ' So now **let us divide up the rice fields with boundaries** '. We provide these details here to give our readers an insight into the early Indian concepts of supply and demand, of production and consumption etc. and their gradual maturing up to sound economic principles like equitable distribution.

Early Buddhist texts also know a great deal about the growth of communities, urban culture and industrial development. Rulers appear to handle with great success the resources of the land, both human and material, undoubtedly under proper and wise direction of counselors and directors, This is **where Buddhism promptly steps in to admonish rulers to seek the advice of serious and sincere religious men**, and act accordingly **in times of political crisis or collapse of governments** [See Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta, DN. III. p. 61]. Kūṭadanta Sutta of the Digha Nikaya [DN. I. 135 f.] reflects great wisdom in this direction. It shows how the rulers handle the man power resources of the land with great wisdom, without putting square pegs in round holes, no matter for whatever reason. Paying due heed to personal skills and aptitudes, people are selected for agricultural and pastoral pursuits [*kasi-gorakkhe*], for trade and commercial ventures [*vānījjāya*] as well as for civil and administrative purposes [*rāja-porise*]. An amazingly impregnated Pali word *ussahati* which carries with it the meaning of 'ability and willingness to cope with a situation ' is used every time when ' competence, aptitude and temperament ' is thought of in terms of successful employment.

In this manner, Buddhist texts provide a great deal of useful information relating to the productivity of the land and its people. There are incentives and inducements coming from the state. To those engaged in agriculture, the king or

the state is said to provide seed [*bījā*] for sowing and planting as well as consumer goods for the men who work on the land. This is implied in the word *bhatta* which is coupled with the word *bījā* [as in *bījā-bhatta*] given above. The extent of state patronage of agriculture can be gauged from the Commemorial note on this which speaks of ' repeated offers of seed, consumer goods and even agricultural implements in case of failure or inadequacy ' [*dinne appahonte aññam pi bījañ ca bhattañ ca kasi-paribhaṇḍañ ca sabbam detu*. DA.I. 296]. To those engaged in trade, monetary provision for the purchase of stocks, i.e. goods for sale, is made. Various sectors of employment are correctly assessed and appreciated. These attitudes invariably provided job satisfaction to everyone concerned.

With this kind of set up and organizational skill in the state, there was undoubtedly vast amounts of produce in the land, both agricultural and industrial, well above local needs. Indeed so, because everybody was happy and willing to work for their country. People's needs by way of food and clothing, and even articles of day to day use were perhaps more than adequately met. In consequence of this, people were happy and joyous [*manussā ca mudā modamānā* DN. I. 135]. State revenue was at a very high level [*mahā ca rañño rāsiko bhavissati*. Ibid.].

With enough goods to sell, and with enough money in the hands of people to buy, trade with them would have been a very smoothly lubricated social process, with neither the buyer nor the seller having any need to resort to fraud or cunning. Hence no crime, no villainy or restlessness in the land [*Khematṭhā janapadā akaṇṭakā anupapīṭā*. Ibid.], **these being invariable rewards for good governing**. We believe the above instructions are **eternally wise lessons in statecraft** through which **rulers in any part of the world should be put**. These, we also believe, are lessons to be learnt via religion. This why the English educated western world, by no means Sri Lankan, speak with honesty when they say **Religion, the missing Dimension of Statecraft**. This is the title of a recent publication of the Oxford University Press, 1994. Edited by Douglas Johnston

and Cynthia Sampson.

Thus we see that with wise and benevolent government of a country where the rulers genuinely express a keen desire to make people happy [that being the Buddhist definition of the word *rājā* or king as 'one who keeps the subjects delighted' [*janam rañjayatī ' ti rājā*], people turn to work and the country invariably becomes productive. The country must be productive both qualitatively and quantitatively, whether in agriculture or in industry. Industry, in the first instance, must be relative to the industrial potential of the land. There must also be equal concern for **the need in the land for such industrial output**. The mere rapacious joy of monetary gains from the sale and export of such destructive industrial products like fire arms which the big nations of the world today wildly engage in or the intriguing political alliances they seek to build up on account of these trade pacts are to be shunned as diabolic acts of crime, well before post-war tribunals endeavour to sit in judgement over them.

There must also be justifiably harnessable labour in the land, without indiscreetly tearing off the males and the females, the younger and the older from their homes, from their well-established [or should be well-established] home lives, on the mere offer of fat salary packets. Evils of these have already been witnessed in the country today as revealed in many recent commission reports relating to the creation of industrial villages as pay back for election benefits. One must also see to the adequacy of raw material [not forgetting the fate of government established plywood factories and their lamentable closure] and the legitimacy of establishing any industrial plants any where, without considering the serious health hazards to the people of the area and any threat of the environmental pollution, both physical and cultural.

Produce of the land thereafter moves from hand to hand, in terms of supply and demand, and the process of trade is set in motion. To begin with, what is in excess of need, also begins to find their way out by way of sale, both within and without. This is followed by production for export. Nobody seems to be worried about as to what is produced and on whose advice and for export where. These

certainly are vital considerations about which the country as a whole should know. In consequence of reliable and regular production of quality goods, new buyers can be sought who pay fair prices with larger margins of profit. In the world of trade today one can sooner or later discover crippling or even death-dealing viruses like preferences, protectionism, embargoes etc. Officials handling foreign affairs and trade ministries should know best to deal with these.

Thus it becomes clear that trade which comes in the wake of well organized productivity in the land can become a real determinant of life style of the people. Even if we start with the very early items of human civilization like agriculture and cattle rearing, there are many illuminating ideas which we can gather from the wisdom of the ancients. Buddhist teachings which relate to successful living in the world into which we are born are full of such instructions.

Wealth comes from the energetic and wise application of human resources. The Pali expression of this idea runs as *Uṭṭhātā vindate dhanam* = He who strives earns wealth. 'Care not for heat and cold in the weather pattern any more than you care for a blade of grass ' [*Yo ca sītañ ca uṇhañ ca tiṇā bhiyyo na maññati*]. With this attitude, if one applies oneself to the task with real manly vigour, happiness shall never desert him. So do our Buddhist texts say *Karam purisa-kiccāni so sukhā na vihāyati*?

As means of making a living, agriculture and cattle-rearing seem to take precedence over industry. Science and technology which are much needed in industry come on the scene of human development very much later. Agriculture, we believe, in its very pursuit, gets man nearer to nature and watches, as it were, the growth of man and nature in close proximity to each other. This is a healthy aspect in life to look out for. The cutting down of the wet forests of South America to make grasslands for cattle-rearing in the interests of meat processors and beef eaters is today looked upon as a contradiction and a glaring blunder. In Sri Lanka, reckless clearing of mountain sides in the central highlands to find room for tea plantations, alienating people from their established homelands, does not appear to be any different in its stupidity. It only serves the interests of powerful

blocks of egotistic gold-seekers.

Before big money is sought for smaller blocks of power wielders, the larger areas of the commoners of the land must be looked into. Thus should the generosity and magnanimity of the state be manifested. The basic food supplies of the bulk of the country, and not the import of luxury items like ham and bacon, must be the urgent priority. Better the possibility of getting these out of our own land, happier and more secure would everybody be. As items of food supply for the majority and our masses, the freshness and wholesomeness of what is grown in our own country can be better guaranteed.

Home-grown mung dhal, i.e. *mun aṭa* and many other varieties of native pulses should replace imported Mussore dhal. So should our sweet potatoe or *batala*, with many competitively rich varieties of red-skins, whites and yellows sweep the board and send potatoes underground. But many Sri Lankan housewives would weep and wipe a tear off their faces if imported dhal and potatoes were not on their daily menu or were not available for purchase even at black market prices. They would find it difficult to thicken their soups without dhal, not knowing what miracles others do, in other countries like Australia, with things like cob corn or *baḍa iringu* and pumpkins which grow so luxuriantly in our land.

What about the dozens of varieties of yams or tubers [*Vel ala* and *Jāvā ala* etc], white and purple in clour, both aerial and underground which grow on the creepers in the country side? They would make lovely trailers even on mango trees [not necessarily on imported ones] in the city gardens, with bunches of delightful aerial tubers, outdoing in beauty the grape wines. Mature ones of these aerial tubers, when boiled and peeled, would beat in shape and colour a plateful of larger-sized strawberries. The test of them is in the eating. These miracle food providers need for their growing only pits of about three feet by three feet by three feet, filled with soft peaty soil.

Thanks to nature, the sun and rain would look after them, even without having to chant blessings for their growth, saying *Devo vassatu kālena sassa-*

*sampatti hotu ca*. These, we have eaten with relish, more than sixty seventy years ago, as children of ten fifteen years, often sharing them with our neighbours in the village, as we dig them out of the ground with our grand parents. Ask us and we shall tell you more about them. Some of these, we would say are good enough for export to any part of the world. Why not, if lotus roots and canned *Tambili* juice from Thailand can be had in Australia and Tapioca yams from West Indies can be purchased in many Canadian cities like Toronto?

Finally, talking in terms of sales, trade and exports, let us turn to a few pages of Buddhist thinking on this subject. The Buddha or his teachings, we are glad to note, has thought it fit to pass down to posterity a few instructions, a few guidelines regarding the propriety of trading in certain commodities. With the interests of humanity at heart, Buddhist thinking considers it necessary to pronounce judgement with regard to the permissibility of sale, within the human community, of certain commodities. In this business of sale and trade or *vanijjā* as they call it in our Buddhist texts [or *velandām* in Sinhala], they have unequivocally placed a ban on the sale of five commodities. [See Anguttara III. p.208. *Pañca imā bhikkhave vanijjā upāsakena akaraṇīyā: sattha, satta, maṃsa, majja, visa*]. They are 1. *sattha* or weapons and armaments, 2. *satta* or living beings which is specifically taken here as 'sale of humans as slaves' [*manussa-vikkayo* at AA. III. 303], *maṃsa* or flesh of animals [i.e. of fish, bird or beast. But the Commentary explains it as 'sale of animals reared for meat': *sūkara-migādayo posetvā tesam vikkayo*. Ibid.], 4. *majja* or drugs and intoxicants and 5. *visa* or poison. The sale of these, it is enjoined, neither should one do, nor get others to do [*Iti sabbam 'pi imaṃ vanijjaṃ neva attanā na pare samādapetvā kāretuṃ vaṭṭati*. Ibid.]

What wisdom-packed vision for the world, reflected more than two and a half millennia ago. This is well before the development of science and technology which undeniably brought us to the forefront of deadly weapons of war, causing limitless death and destruction as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not to speak of the carnage in the battle fields of Europe during the World War II and elsewhere.

Whether in the battle field or in the domestic front, weapons are, by their very name, tools of destruction.

Whether a woman carries a revolver, even a small size one, in her hand bag to defend herself against her husband or her boy friend, as publicly declared by high-ranking women from the most civilized parts of the world, guns and knives which come under the category of *sattha* are killer weapons. They are not to be made freely available through sale, neither to the adult nor the juveniles. They come therefore under forbidden articles of trade. With the development of scientific research and modern technology, more articles like plastic explosives of the suicide bombers, and killer germs like anthrax and other chemicals are known to be made available by big world powers for use in the battle fields. This menace of illicit sale of weapons of war, both openly and under cover, has indeed to be banned.

The world knows enough of the history of the slave trade and about its whose who even in India. But even today the world witnesses a considerable amount of exploitation of labour, specially of children, females and the under privileged. They would all come under the trading and trafficking in humans. Buddhist thinking totally denounces it. Respectful and conscientious employment of females and younger ones is dealt with separately [See DN. III.191: *yathābalaṃ kammanta-saṃivadhānena*].

As for trading in meat or animals for meat production, we would assume the very first precept of the *pañca-sīla* would impose a ban on this. How can a Buddhist country like Sri Lanka, with a religious culture of more than twenty-three centuries, and with a near seventy per cent of its population being Buddhist by religion, be suspected, even at the level of rumour, of exporting meat to the world outside? Is it infantile ignorance, abject poverty or globalized stupefaction by higher grade powers? In civilized states of democracy, at least in the eastern theatre, there can be no secret pacts on these. People have a right to know as to what is going on in their name. Democracy is necessarily a form of government of the people, and there must necessarily be a degree of transparency in all its



activities.

Sale of drugs and alcohol is now going overboard everywhere. Marseilles once produced marijuana and the United States of America kept on purchasing it from them for home consumption. One kept saying ' We buy it because you produce it '. And the other, equally vociferously replied saying ' We produce it because you continue buying it from us '. After much wrangling, when Marseilles ceased to be the exporter, Mexico gleefully stepped in to be the honourable supplier. In the sector of alcohol, Sri Lanka's domestic sales as well as its export to the world outside, both necessarily come within this fourth item of forbidden commodities of sale. Buddhism or no Buddhism, the world knows of the menace of alcohol, both at domestic and at high elite social level. And the saner world endeavours to arrest it.

But fortunately [or otherwise], we have built up the alcohol trade, both the production and sale, with the patronage of government after government, to be the bed rock of our national economy. Drugs too, have invaded our land in more recent years. Everybody knows from where and through whom drugs come. And in the efficiency of drug peddling in the land, we undoubtedly score a highest ever, perhaps in southeast Asia. But we are never ever near Singapore or Malaysia in effectively dealing with the problem. Many kinsmen and near and dear ones of those in power are known to be flourishing through this trade. What manner of friendly coalition war would rid the land of this tyranny?

As for the final one of sale of poison, we Sri Lankans need some high-powered magnifying glasses to be really sensitive about this. In our sale of foods and some of our local medical products, we are not totally assured of their non-toxic quality. With us, the Bureau of Sri Lankan Standards [SLS] is one of fairly recent origin. We can therefore be selling out a good many items of harmful food and drink to our people, particularly to our children.

This subject of forbidden commodities of sale is today one of international importance. In the interests of physical health and moral well being of our unborn

generations, let us give serious thought to this. We hope that moment will not be a day too late.